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## Domestication and Exclusion from Voices: A Study Based on Women in Estate Community in Sri Lanka

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### Abstract

The study examined the problem underlying the main causes of women becoming domesticated and how this eventually leads to their voices being silenced in both social and economic spheres. Used a sample of estate women in the Galle district of the Southern Province to collect data and analyzed it is using a mixed-methods research approach. As sample techniques, systematic random sampling and purposive sampling were used, and questionnaires, interviews served as data gathering instruments. According to the report, voiceless estate women are unable to obtain a good education, which had led to poor literacy. They are also unable to contribute equally to the household income or stand up for their own decisions or the decisions of their children. They were imprisoned for ensuring their subsistence, carrying out home duties, and caring of children. Women who work in the estate sector are not owners or inheritors of any property. They face discrimination in society and are unable to acquire finance, go to school, make a living, or hold office in community organisations. The essay conclude with they are still awaiting an opportunity to speak out against domestication because of their domestication. The women in the estate sector understand and accept domestication as a necessity without any rejection because it is fundamentally established based on norms and culture.

**Keywords:** *Development, Domestication, Estate Sector, Poverty, Tamil Women, Voiceless*

## Introduction

The history of estate Tamils in Sri Lanka began in the 1820s, when the British started plantations in the island's hill country. The estate Tamils originally came to the country from South Indian communities as migratory labourers to work on coffee plantations and as residential labourers to work on tea estates (Kanapathypillei, 2011). Since becoming citizens, Tamils of Indian origin had been recognised as one of Sri Lanka's minority communities. As a result, they had to cope up with a slew of issues and obstacles that were out of the ordinary. These people were particularly affected at the time by labour exploitation, insufficient sanitation and health care facilities, and a shortage of housing and other essential necessities. Their difficulties in obtaining a mortgage, proper housing, and sanitary amenities indicate their political and social vulnerabilities. A number of movements to achieve citizenship rights and criteria occurred throughout Sri Lankan history (Jayawardana, 1972). These movements were committed to obtain the ability to vote and permanent citizenship. In the estate sector, women continue to have greater challenges than men in terms of accessing basic requirements, social security, employment possibilities, obtaining education and health care, and so on<sup>®</sup> (Policy Studies). The harsh reality was that they had no possibilities to live their lives in the same way that women in other parts of the country do. It is well known that women are more vulnerable than males in general, but women in the estate sector are more vulnerable than the other women. They face great poverty and live in deplorable social conditions<sup>®</sup>, despite having a considerable impact on the national economy and contributing to foreign exchange. Women had always been the key contributors to both the family and plantation economy. They primarily perform labor-intensive tasks such as harvesting tea and tapping rubber. Rural and estate communities face a number of economic and social challenges, including limited access to water and agricultural land, gaps in physical infrastructure such as power and transportation, a lack of adequate technology, and weak institutional structures. In most people's eyes, such scene may look out of place, even absurd, because the domestication of women is neither original nor culturally specific. One definition of domestication of women is a woman's place in the home. This "women tend the home mentality," on the other hand, limits the potential of a family. Women's economic success in the workplace had been limited by the notion that they are only valuable at home, likewise limited the level of contribution that men may make. This way of thinking also puts more pressure on working

women to be responsible for not only their careers but also the majority of household management.

People working in the estate sector are one of the most marginalized groups in the country, in part because the majority of its population is descended from indentured labour brought from India in the early 1900s, they were not granted citizenship, and they lived for decades without state provision of social services. Estate labourers were fully reliant on the estate's administration for their fundamental necessities at the time, including housing, health care, and education. As a result, there are significant disparities in access to and utilization of health services between the estate sector and the rest of the country.

According to the World Bank, the distinctive organizational structure of the estates is the core reason for the perpetuation of poverty in this case (World Bank, 2007). Furthermore, plantation labourers are culturally and linguistically distinct from the Sinhalese population, as well as physically isolated from the rest of the country. Previous researchers believed that women in the estate sector, who made up a significant proportion of the Sri Lankan population, continued to experience greater challenges than men in acquiring basic requirements, social security, economic prospects, education, and health care. Furthermore, they discriminated in numerous domains due to cultural conventions. The harsh reality is that they had no opportunities to live normal lives as women in other parts of the country. Overall, while all women are susceptible, women in the estate industry are more vulnerable than women in other sectors in Sri Lanka. When striving to raise awareness of health-recommended practices, this creates a barrier. Research on the estate sector in the southern part of the country is a niche in the rest of the country because there had been no or very few studies on estate women in the lower region. The estate sector makes a sizable contribution to national income (CBSL, 2015). However, the real estate sector is left out of mainstream socioeconomic development and financial inclusion. The estate sector community is one of the country's most marginalized (ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic) and impoverished (Ramesh, Rasnayake, & Kamalrathne, 2013; Sivapragasam, 2005). Although a large number of estate Tamils were originally residents of the upcountry estates, Indian origin Tamils had been moved to the southern part of the country due to the expansion of tea and rubber plantations in those areas. Although Tamils of Indian heritage continued to live as a separate society in the north, they coexist with Sinhala majorities in the south. The purpose of this research is to discover the reasons for estate women's

domestication and how they had become a mute society in social life. As a result, studies on the low country or southern province estate sector was less than others. Then the current study finds its niche in geographical areas as well. So the current study focused on Tamil women of Indian heritage living in the country's south. Although Tamils of Indian descent continue to live as a separate population from the majorities of certain districts in the north, they mix with Sinhala majorities in the south. The researcher aimed to investigate living places with a majority community, the estate sector women had been marginalized and removed from the mainstream social process, and how they had become a voiceless community in social life.

### **Literature Review**

One African study, conducted in East and South Ethiopia, discovered that sociocultural construction and practices affected gender activities in the rural area (Tedesa, Mengistu, Kesari, Mohammed, Kebede & Abegaz, 2015). In this study, all female respondents had been perceived their engagement as an obligation. They do not refuse any task that is provided to them. Women's durations from waking up in the morning to sleeping at night will be overpowering, and they may be significantly longer than men's. The large amount of time allotted to women is due to the large number of activities that they must perform as part of their commitment. Aside from housework, the women do out-of-house duties that are classified as domestic.

The same situation exists in Brazil, where women assist males working on farms while having their fate chosen by men (Brumer, 2008). The man is regarded as superior, while the woman is regarded as inferior. As a subordinate, the woman is obligated to do whatever the man, her superior, says. Worse, the lady is barred from acquiring land as an inheritance. It may diminish the Brazilian woman's status, but the Tnyafar woman sees it as an obligation rather than a compulsion. One study looks at power dynamics in the home and discovers that the distribution and allocation of power among household members have been structured in a way that respects the woman's position both inside and outside the family and household (Pudjiwati, 1983).

According to Blood and Wolfe (1960), the most essential component of family structure is the position of family members based on the distribution and allocation of power, which is then followed by the aspect of family work division. The ability to make decisions that affect

family life is characterized as power. Depending on the work, the husband and wife may have equal or distinct power values. Indeed, as spouses, mothers, and in a variety of other roles, women, like men, have deliberately produced the situations under investigation. Despite the fact that women are actively present in the majority of social circumstances, researchers, the public, and social actors, both male and female, have been blind to their existence. Furthermore, while women's responsibilities in most social contexts are crucial, they are distinct from, less favoured than, and subservient to men's duties. Their obscurity is merely one manifestation of this inequity (Ritzer, 2000). The feminist viewpoint had been present throughout Western history. Wherever women had been subjugated and they have been subordinated almost constantly and everywhere they have recognised and resisted (Lerner, 1993).

There have already been numerous studies on the role of women, with various outcomes. (Salaa, 2015) shows that spouses who work outside the home never relinquish their duties as housewives and mothers in the family. He discovered that spouses in the farming community perform two functions. The first is a domestic job that entails cooking, cleaning the house, and educating the child or children, while the second is a public function that entails assisting the husband on a farm or caring for livestock.

In terms of educational attainment and health outcomes such as immunization rates, nutritional status of women and children, and infant and child mortality rates, the estate sector has historically lagged behind the rest of Sri Lanka (Department of Census, 2002).

According to Wanninayake M. Semasinghe's study, "Women's Labour Force Participation in Sri Lanka: An Inquiry into the Factors Influencing Women's Participation in the Labour Market" women have the lowest representation in the formal sector in the estate sector. In addition, the estate sector has the highest number of women in the informal sector. He has highlighted the causes behind this as a lack of education, backward attitudes, a lack of information about work prospects, and a lack of abilities to cope with available opportunities.

Amali Philip talks about the rights of state Tamils in Sri Lanka. In her study, she further discusses the status of the rights of the estate Tamil community. The "Grant of Citizenship to Persons of Indian Origin" Act, No. 35 of 2003, brought an end to the long, simmering issue

that had plagued Sri Lanka's Estate Tamil population, seventy percent of whom are resident workers on the island's tea plantations.

Though they are citizens of Sri Lanka, their rights were violated by the authorities. Further, she has described the nature of the rights of the women in the estate community. She has revealed that women in the Tamil community have no proper rights. They only have citizenship. But they have no other opportunities, like proper education. Proper health, etc. Citizenship is not limited to voting rights based on territorial residence alone but includes equality in the private and public spheres as well as the opportunity for political participation. The estate Tamil women are disadvantaged in all these areas: as an ethnic minority, a lower class of wage workers, and as female kin in patriarchal households. However, discussion of citizenship creates the ground for new space. The debates around citizenship have also created a new 'space' for considering the rights of politically and economically marginalized communities (ethnic and religious minorities) within multi-ethnic and multicultural societies (Yuval-Davis, 1997).

Kurian has conducted research on the topic of "the vulnerability of women in the economy". In this study, they have discussed the vulnerability of women in the economic sector. They argue that the vulnerable condition of the economy paves the way for other disturbances. The vulnerability of women, then, is a function of gender relations as well as of other manifestations of power: class, caste, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, etc. Women can be vulnerable in monetary terms, but they can also be vulnerable because of insecurity, sexual harassment, or domestic violence, in relation to natural hazards, or because of political and economic exploitation and victimization (Kurian, 1998).

The domestication of women's roles has been examined in many studies. (Khotidjah and Madkur, 2018) indicated that Salafi women in the metropolitan city of Lampung believe that, basically, profess never questions women's domestication, and therefore, the husband's order is to never been a troublemaker. The women in the estate sector sincerely accept all the workloads that are given to them due to the conviction that this arrangement is ordered by customs. The rationality behind the domestication of women's roles in the estate sector is almost equal.

## **Theoretical Background**

The researcher employed feminist theory as the theoretical underpinning. Cultural feminism, radical feminism, and liberal feminism principles have been utilized in reverse.

### **Liberal Feminism**

Liberal feminism is the most prominent expression of gender inequality theory, arguing that women can claim equality with men on the basis of an essential human capacity for reasoned moral agency, that gender inequality is the result of a sexist patterning of the division of labour, and that gender equality can be produced by transforming the division of labour through the re-patterning of key institutions such as law, work, family, education and media (Bem, 1993; Friedan, 1963; Lorbe, 1963). Liberal feminists have a lengthy history dating back to the 18th century and Wollstonecraft's efforts for equal rights and equal opportunity for women (Mannathoko 1992). Their theories center on the discriminatory practices that prevent women from participating equally in society. They had been also concerned with the liberation of women. Whatever the case, their goal is for women to have equal educational opportunities as men, to be liberated from men's oppression, and to be included in decision-making and activities that would be benefited their work choices.

Liberal feminist sociologists had developed three primary insights about the public-private patterning of social life in a series of now classic works (Acker, 1990, Hochschild and Machung, 1989): (1) The dynamics of the private world limit women's agency and, thus, their participation in the public sphere; (2) the public sphere itself is organized around gender assumptions that keep women at a disadvantage; and (3) negotiating the interface of private and public is perhaps the most formidable and enduring of the barriers to women's economic equality.

### **Radical Feminists**

The oppression of women is viewed by radical feminist thinkers as connected to the structure of the society. Their point of view was based on allegations that the structural relationship between the genders had shifted power to the male and that the patriarchal role of male control over women must be addressed. Men are positioned as having power,

expertise, and control over the family as the head and breadwinner, with unquestionable authority.

### **Objectives of the Research**

In the occupation of tea plucking, women tend to work longer hours and earn lower wages compared to their male counterparts. This can be attributed to the higher demand for female labour in tea plucking as opposed to the demand for male labour in estate maintenance. Women encounter the hierarchical structure of plantations and the patriarchal dynamics within households across various roles and positions, encompassing their responsibilities as labourers, mothers, wives, widows, daughters, sisters, daughters-in-law, and sisters-in-law. Despite being employed as tea pluckers, the only task these ladies are able to perform within the plantation sector is tea picking. They have been subjected to suppression under patriarchal dominance. The primary aims of this study were to investigate the factors contributing to the domestication of women in the estate sector and to explore how these factors contribute to the suppression of their agency and power.

### **Research Methodology**

The study had used mixed methods in data collection and analysis. Hence, both qualitative and quantitative data had been collected and analyzed. Surveys and interviews were used as techniques. Questionnaires and interviews were employed as data collection tools. Semi-structured interviews and key informant interviews were used to collect qualitative data, and respondents to the qualitative data were selected purposefully to represent various segments of the estate, such as the elders, young generation, women, and key informants. The questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data. Respondents to the quantitative data collection methods were selected through a simple random method and represent 20% of the total worker families at the study location. The sample frame was developed based on the list of housing numbers of the workers families in every division that belongs to the estate management. Using the sample frame, once in every five families of every division was selected. Primary data was collected from Talgaswala estate in Galle district in southern Sri Lanka. Talgaswala Estate is one of the large estates in the Nagoda divisional secretariat office area. Mainly, the estates belong to the Nagoda and Niyagama Divisional Secretariat office areas. Talgaswala estate lies between two divisional secretariat office areas in Galle district



and has a land area of 600 acres. Talgaswala estate is located in Galle district. Tamils are the majority people of the state, and Sinhalese are getting second place. Many people in the state are Hindus. However, Buddhist and Christian people are here too. In this area, there is a very specific characteristic. That is, some people follow more than one religion. Some people follow Hinduism and Buddhism, and some people also follow Christianity and Buddhism. The reason behind the selection of Talgaswala estate was the estate Tamils were living in harmony with the Sinhala majority community in the area. A large portion of the state belongs to the Nagoda divisional secretariat area. And also another reason for the selection of this location is the high unemployment rate, illiteracy rate, and level of mixing with the majority Sinhalese. The livelihoods of the vast majority of the people in the estate depend on labour activities in the estate. Among people, 80% depend on the plantations of the estate. The following table shows the whole picture of the estate population. At the beginning of the establishment of the estate, it was governed by the colonial government, and the divisions had been divided for the purpose of administrative concession.

**Table 1:** The distribution of population of the Estate

| Division     | Ethnicity | Worker Popu | Staff Popu | N/w Popu   | Total By Ethnicity | Grand Total |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|------------|------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Lower        | Sinhala   | 10          | 30         | 40         | 80                 | 623         |
|              | Tamil     | 269         | 07         | 267        | 543                |             |
| Upper        | Sinhala   | 00          | 01         | 04         | 05                 | 608         |
|              | Tamil     | 367         | 00         | 236        | 603                |             |
| Middle       | Sinhala   | 04          | 00         | 00         | 04                 | 151         |
|              | Tamil     | 111         | 00         | 36         | 147                |             |
| Gallinda     | Sinhala   | 74          | 04         | 75         | 153                | 305         |
|              | Tamil     | 53          | 00         | 99         | 152                |             |
| North        | Sinhala   | 04          | 01         | 07         | 12                 | 66          |
|              | Tamil     | 40          | 00         | 14         | 54                 |             |
| South        | Sinhala   | 04          | 00         | 07         | 11                 | 17          |
|              | Tamil     | 04          | 00         | 02         | 06                 |             |
| <b>Total</b> |           | <b>940</b>  | <b>43</b>  | <b>787</b> | <b>1770</b>        | <b>1770</b> |

Source: Administration office of Thalgaswala Estate

The table has mentioned below depicted the overall sample of the study.

**Table 2:** Sample of the Study

| Name of the Division | Sample and Methods                              |            |
|----------------------|---|------------|
|                      | Questionnaire Survey (20% form workers' Family) | Interviews |
| Upper                | 41  | 05         |
| Middle               | 51  | 06         |
| Lower                | 18  | 02         |
| Gallinda             | 11  | 01         |
| North                | 11  | 01         |
| South                | 01  |            |
| Total                | 133   | 15         |

Source: Constructed by Researcher, 2022

15 women were purposively sampled for interviews. Before the data analysis, the gathered data was recorded, and transcription, categorization, and thematization were done.

Before the data analysis, the gathered data was recorded, transcribed, categorized, and thematized. Prior to beginning the relatively arduous process of empirical data collection, it was necessary to consider alternative data collection methods, including finding the information in existing texts and literature and interviewing participants who were in possession of the required data.

Theme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research. The data were categorized into four themes. The questions of the questionnaires were based on personal data, economic conditions, social conditions, and political conditions of the women of minority ethnic groups in the estate.

## Results and Discussion

The analysis of data involved a process of transforming and modelling data with the goal of highlighting useful information, suggesting results, and supporting decision-making. The following four themes had been emerged from the interviews and questionnaires with the various respondents: Poverty, Lack of skills and ability, Community/society participation and representation, also Decision making.

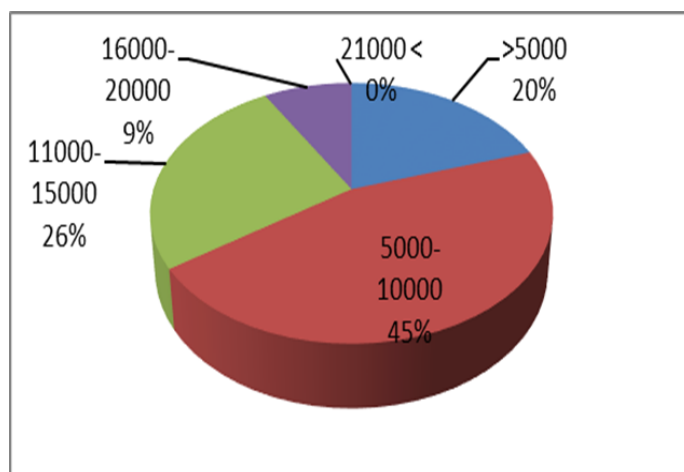
### The Poverty Condition of the Women in Minority Ethnic Group in Estate Sector

In the past, poverty was understood as economic weakness, but now it had changed and another perception had been emerged regarding poverty. There are several aspects in terms of poverty. Poverty is mainly viewed as an indicator of a lack of access to resources and income opportunities. But it has other aspects of social positioning such as geographical location, age, gender, class, ethnicity, community structure, community decision-making process, and political issues those determine poor people's vulnerability (Adger, W. et al., 2006). According to the gathered data, there are many reasons for poverty in the study location. These reasons are described as follows:

#### Low Income

The main reason for the economic poverty among these women was low income. The status of monthly income had been depicted using the following chart: Paralleling the living costs of the country, the monthly income level of these women is not enough to even fulfil their daily needs.

**Figure 1:** Monthly Income Level of the Respondents

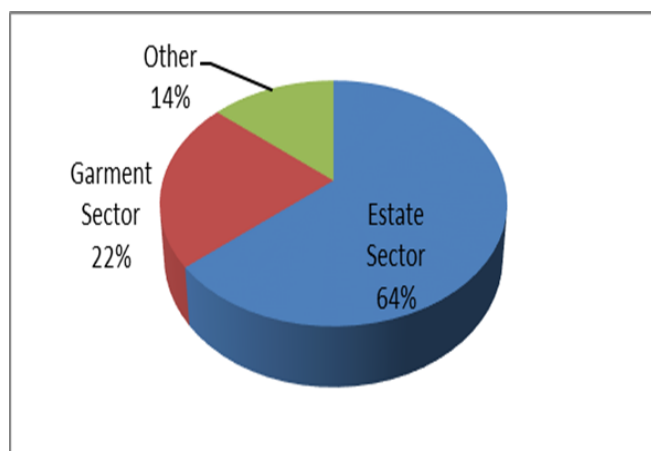


Source: Survey Data, 2022

According to the above table, we could be able to identify the nature of the monthly income level. A large number of women belong to the 5000 LKR–10000 LKR monthly income category. As a percentage, it is 45%. The reason behind it was that they are daily wage holders. Respondents who were under the category of 21000 LKR, workers in garment

industries, do not earn more than 21000 per month. According to their occupation status table, we can see this situation. Most of the women in these minority communities have engaged with unstable sectors. Due to the instability of their livelihood, they have no proper income to fulfil their daily needs.

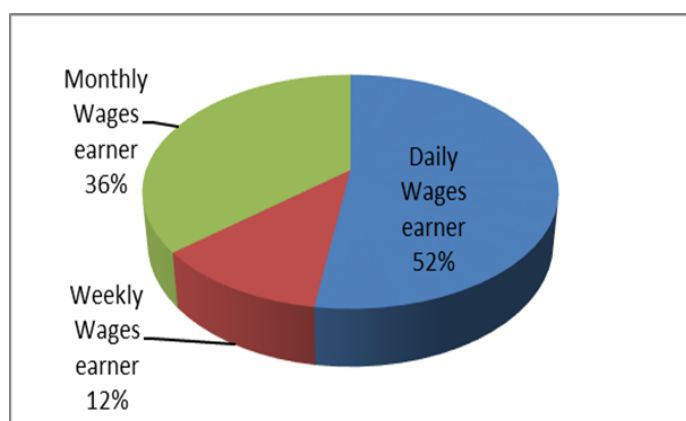
**Figure 2: Unstable Livelihoods**



Source: Survey Data, 2022

According to the above chart, a large number of women are employed in the estate sector. As a percentage, it is 64%. Altogether, garment sectors and other categories account for 36%. Women, who are engaged with the estate sector, get a low salary scale. According to their opinions, they said that it is not enough even to fulfil their daily basic needs.

**Figure 3: Irregular Wage Earning**



Source: Survey Data, 2022

The daily wage category had the highest number of women, and the percentage was 52%. The monthly wage category was 36%. Daily and weekly wages were paid to labourers for irregular work on the estate and outside the estate. Monthly wage labourers were regular workers in the estate. Labourers in the garment sector are also belong to the "monthly wage labourers category. Tea pluckers are bound to a minimum daily norm, and it determines the eligibility of a worker for a particular day's payment of wages. If a worker fails to fulfil the daily norm, she becomes automatically disqualified for her daily wage. If a worker plucks above the daily norm, she will be paid an additional payment calculated by the number of kilograms above the norm.

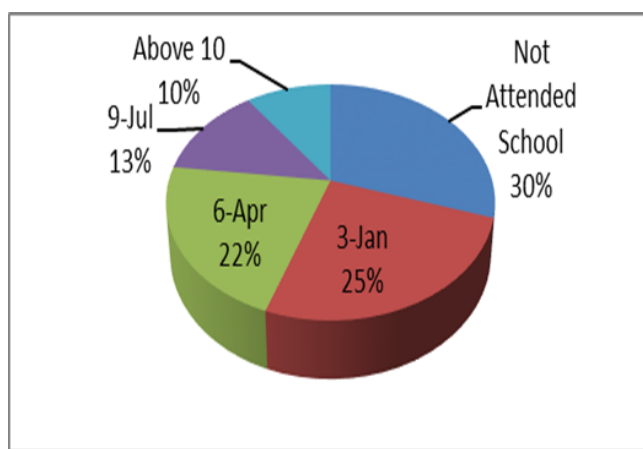
And female headship also paves the way for poverty. Especially, they have been unable to access their property, such as the houses that their husbands built. More specifically, it can be seen the difference between female-headed households and male-headed households. Female-headed households, as well as between households led by widows, single women, and women whose husbands are absent. Female-headed households in the estate deserve special attention since they are typically disadvantaged regarding access to land, labour, credit, and insurance markets, discriminated against by cultural norms, and suffer from, among others, high dependency burdens, economic immobility, and the "double day burden" of their heads. Although it is commonly stated that female-headed households are more vulnerable than households headed by men in terms of shocks and downside risks, little is known empirically about this issue. Despite the abundance of reasons why female-headed households may suffer more from deprivation, empirical evidence on how they translate into, as well as the gender dimensions of, poverty is ambiguous (Chant, 2008).

### **Lack of Education**

Education is the most powerful instrument for empowering women. Women who had a good education are straight-forward and always try to empower their families and children as well. The education level of rural women is low, particularly among estate sector women. The women of the estate had not completed regular education. Poverty is the main reason for a lack of education. And also, this society also favoured male education. The following table indicates the education level of the respondent's women. Poverty is not restricted to one dimension, e.g., income, but manifests itself in all domains of life, such as housing, education, and health (Broussard, A. et al., 2006). That means to alleviate poverty, it should empower

people through education. Then only they can understand their poverty trap. Without the ability to read, write, and do basic arithmetic, rural women are going to be forever trapped in very low-skilled jobs, if they can find employment at all. (Peters, 2001). According to the chart, it can be mentioned that a large number of women belong to the category of 'not attending school'. Only a very small percentage of women have completed primary education. In fact, only 10 percent of respondents have passed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade of school education.

**Figure 4:** Education Level of the Respondents



Source: Constructed by Researcher, 2022

Liberal feminists are particular about equal opportunity for education for both genders, but radical feminists question the quantity and quality of education that is accessible to both genders. They believe gender bias in education is the cause of the perpetuation of female oppression (Mannathoko 1992). They make the case for women's empowerment through education and think that it will lead to gender parity and dispel societal expectations of women's roles.

### **Lack of Skills and Ability**

Lack of education is another part of their domestication. Un-education paves the way for a lack of skills. This condition is a barrier to getting proper livestock and continuing it. Due to this reason, they were unable to go beyond the estate to find livestock. If they find out about the livestock, they were unable to do that regularly due to a lack of skills. Therefore, they had to limit their lives to the estate. And also, their lack of education and dropping out of school

led to early marriages (Philips, 2003). According to the European Institute of Gender Equality, early marriages are marriages of individuals whose level of physical, emotional, sexual, and psychosocial development makes them unable to freely consent to marriage. There is a tendency for girls to marry early in the estate sector. They drop out of school beyond the proper age, and then they join the labour force in the estate sector. Early marriages might be a burden for them because they have less experience in their lives and in society. Early marriages further caused their domestication.

One of the respondents had revealed this idea, and according to this statement, it could be identified that the domestication of girls started when they were in childhood. After left out their education, they had to look after their siblings, or else they had to work in the estate.

“I did not go to school. My parents had no ability to spend money on our studies. Although I had a desire to go to school, my father said that there was no need to go to school, and when you are 10 to 12 years old, you can go to work and earn money. After I left the school, I had to look after my younger siblings”.

For several generations, they have been poor, and due to this, they have continued their lives, fulfilling only their daily needs. Parents were daily wage labourers, and they were unable to provide a proper education for their children. Because of their poverty, many of them had to give up their education. When they left school, these girls had to help maintain and improve the economic condition of the family. Though they have no experience taking care of children, they have survived in this context. According to the following statement, further evidence can be seen of this condition.

“I studied for up to 2 years. My parents then stopped funding my studies. I had to look after my younger siblings. When I was 13 years old, I started to work in the estate sector”.

Because of poverty, not only that they had to lose their formal education, but they also had to sacrifice their desires in order to contribute to their families' income. Although they do not contribute to the family's income in a direct way, indirectly they had contribute to it. This is the pioneering reason and first step of the domestication of women in the estate sector. Mainly, the eldest daughter of a family has to face this condition. The following statement from the interview indicates this scenario:

“Though I worked the whole day, I got less salary than my husband. My older daughter looked after her younger siblings. Otherwise, I can’t go to work. She sacrificed her life on behalf of her siblings”.

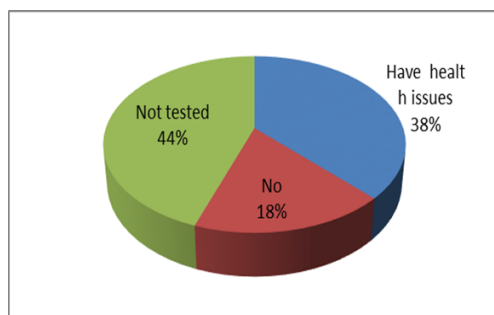
The liberal perspective is also concerned with women’s liberation. Whatever the case, their aim is for women to have equal positions as men in education, be liberated from men’s suppression, and be involved in decision-making and activities that will be in favour of their work choice. However, these women have no equal right to education. Many factors have contributed to the low education level of these women. Among them, external factors are the main causes, such as poverty, a lack of resources, and shortcomings in the school. Interview number 4 further explains how these external factors contribute to the lack of education in this sector.

“In the school, there were many shortcomings. Teachers came, and within a short period, they transferred. So they couldn’t continue their education. Then they also engaged in estate work. My daughters help me with household chores. My daughter got married when she was 15 years old”.

### Poor Health Condition

Being healthy is very important for everyone who engages in hard work. Health is not only about physical well-being but also mental well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as ‘An idyllic blend of mental, physical, social and spiritual well-being’. According to this definition, it could be identified that these women have a low level of well-being. The following chart depicts the health condition of women workers.

**Figure 5:** Health Condition of the Respondents



Source: Survey Data, 2022



According to the above chat, we can identify that many women among the respondents are suffering from at least one of the health issues. Respondents who had mentioned that they are suffering from health issues were 38%. Some of them are suffering from cancer, some of them are suffering from diabetes, and some of them are suffering from low blood pressure or high blood pressure. All of these are non-communicable diseases. A significant number of women respondents were patients of non-communicable diseases. Because they have no good dietary system. And they also can't access good health facilities. Even when they are suffering from serious health issues, they are unable to access proper treatment because of their economic condition. Though they use government hospitals for health facilities, they finally have to buy medicine from the private sector. It had been difficult for them to spend money due to the lack of income. The poor health condition of these women paved the way for their domestication, and they are not actively participating in work either.

These patients should go to medical clinics weekly or monthly. Though they participate in the medical clinic of the government hospital, those are rural hospitals. And they also have to buy medicine prescribed by doctors. They must have money in hand to buy medicine from pharmacies. Due to this, they normally don't participate in medical clinics. So they have to work despite serious health issues. This condition could further be identified by the following statement: In this way, they had to struggled to survive and continue their lives.

“I am a cancer patient. Though I am suffering from cancer, we can't stay at home. If we stay at home, where can we find money or who will give us money? I must participate in the medical clinic. But how can I participate in it? If I participate in the medical clinic, I can't find money to spend tomorrow. Though I participate in clinics, they ask us to buy medicine from private pharmacies. How can I buy medicine from it?”.

### **Lack of Land and House Ownership**

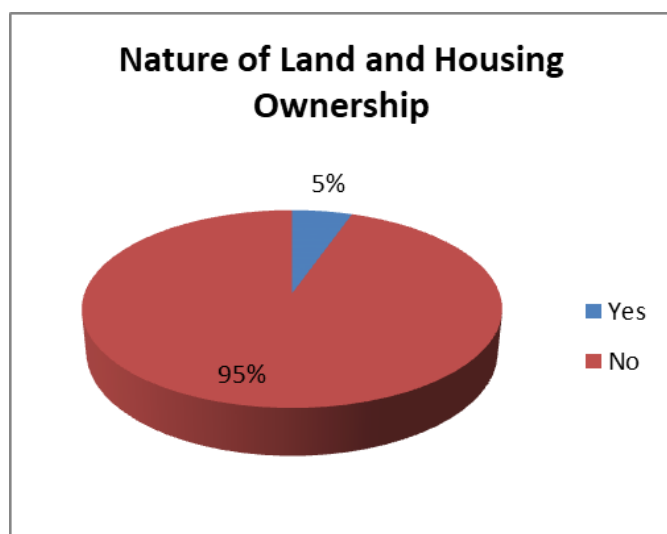
In this society, men and women have to struggle to live without separation. On the estate, the Tamil female community faces many problems in relation to basic needs. They should have basic needs such as food, water, sanitation, shelter, and protection, If they need to survive. However, they are at a low level of fulfilment of basic needs. If they want to fulfil their basic needs, they have to struggle for them. As an example, they have no proper shelters. They are living in separate rooms. If the estate authority forces them to leave those line rooms, they

have no option in relation to shelters. To build a new house, they have no extra land or ownership of land.

### Land Ownership

The land is the most valuable natural resource for the people. Although these women had lived on this estate for several generations, there is no ownership of the land. It is a very tragic situation for them. Because they do not have ownership, they had been unable to built their homes in a sustainable way. Still, they live in small-scale line rooms that are owned by the estate authority. Though authority is given to them, the authority of the line room is inherited only by men. The following chart depicts the nature of land and housing ownership.

**Figure 6:** Nature of Women Land Ownership



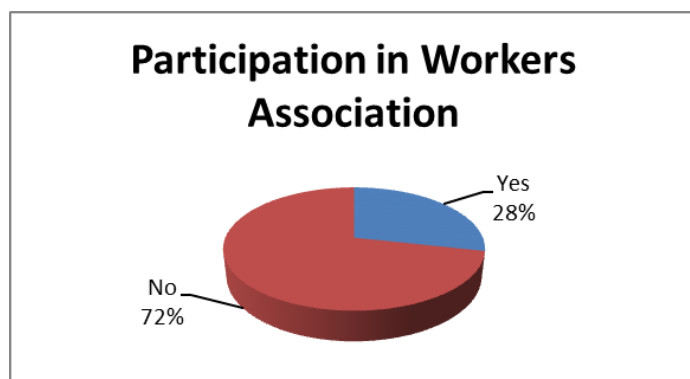
Source: Survey Data, 2022

Only 5% of respondents own a house or property. The ownership had inherited by their husband. After the death of their husbands, these women had been taken ownership, and when their sons are grown, they had to delegate their lineage to the son. The ownership of the line rooms belong to men as the head of the home, and they keep authority over the women. Even these women cannot raise their voices, at home. According to some respondents, when they raised their voices on behalf of their rights in the home, the man who owns the house retaliated against them and used physical power to control them.

## Community and Society Participation and Representation

Community participation means participation in common, community, or social organisations. In other words, community participation is the involvement of people in a community in projects or associations to solve their own problems. Women in many patriarchal societies have to live in subordination, and due to the subordination, their social participation is also subordinate. Women in minority groups face the same scenario when they engage with the community and participate in social activities. According to their responses, the following information could emerge regarding social and community participation: According to them, it could be identified that they are not much interested in the participation of community associations for various reasons. The following chart shows how they participate in the workers association in the estate. It could be depicted that although membership in the workers association is compulsory for workers of the estate, many women do not participate in the workers association, or at least they have no desire to join those associations. Among these respondents, 21% of women have membership in the community (workers) association. 72% of women respondents have no membership in the workers association.

**Figure 7:** Participation in Workers Association



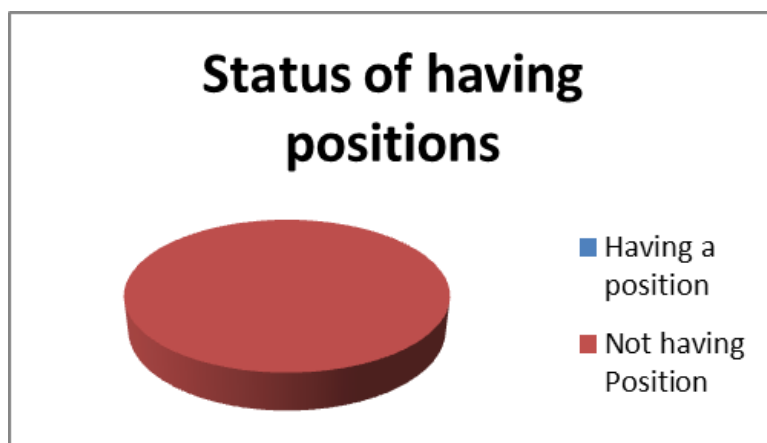
Source: Survey Data, 2022

Though there are no community organisations on the estate, there are worker organisations. According to their statements, it can be shown how the situation can be faced with difficulties without the participation of workers organisations.

Collective representation is very important when the particular group is a minority community or marginalized group. Though it is very important, collective representation is very low among these women. It has been discouraged by the estate authority. If these people are collectively represented, it might be an issue for authority when they are going to win their rights in the working field and also in the domestic field. Due to this reason, they had to become passive communities in both the public and domestic domains.

Although the women participate in the workers association of the estate, they are unable to get leadership even at the grass-roots level. The plantation social structure is completely patriarchal. Lack of inclusion of women in decision-making is a big challenge in the estate sector. This situation has paved the way for women to become part of this voiceless community.

**Figure 8:** Status of Having Positions in Workers Organization or Community Organizations



Source: Constructed by Researcher, 2022

The table has shown that these women have a considerable position in the organization. In fact, they have no positions in the associations. The answer of "no" was no from everybody. It means even one woman has no considerable position. When the researcher asked about participation in the decision-making process in the association, they said that the majority of Sinhala people make the decisions, and they are supposed to accept those decisions.

*"We don't participate in community organisations." There are no community organisations among us. But it is compulsory to participate in the workers organisation. Once a month, it is conducted".*

Though there are no community organisations on the estate, there are worker organisations. According to their statements, it can be shown how vulnerable situations can be without the participation of workers organisations.

*“Without participation from the organization, we can’t go or work the next day. Though we participated continuously, we didn’t get any benefit from it”.*

Participation in decision-making is very important to overcome vulnerable conditions. In the majority and minority contexts, the majority community plays a powerful role in the common ground. This condition is the same for these women. Sinhala and Tamil workers work together on the estate. And also, the workers association also gathered with those two communities. According to their statements, we can identify the nature of their positions within the workers organization.

*“They forced us to participate in that meeting and discuss some difficulties, but we never solved those problems and couldn’t find answers for those difficulties. Without that association, we would not have participated in or engaged with other associations. Sinhala workers are leaders of these associations; they only hope for our participation”.*

## **Decision Making**

### Decision-making and Power Relations within the Family

Participation in decision-making is very important to overcome vulnerable conditions and gather voices. Being an active member in society or in-house makes that particular member a strong member and well aware of those decisions. In the minority context, the majority community plays a powerful role in the common ground, and the minority community has to follow and adhere to their decisions. This condition is the same for these women. Sinhala and Tamil workers work together on the estate. And also, the workers association also gathered with those two communities. According to their statements, there are no opportunities to get a position in the association of women or workers. According to the following statement, it can be understood how this condition prevails in this estate.

*“They forced us to participate in that meeting and discuss some difficulties, but we never solved those problems and couldn’t find answers for those difficulties. Without*

that association, we would not have participated in other associations. Sinhala workers are leaders of these associations; “they expect our participation only”.

The constitution has set the minimum legal age of marriage in Sri Lanka at 18 years. Sexual relations with a girl under 18 years of age, known as ‘defilement’, are illegal and punishable by law, whether or not the sexual union was consensual. Nevertheless, despite national legislation that would seem to protect girls and women from structural gender-based violence, sexual violence occurs at an alarming rate in Sri Lanka. In fact, decisions regarding their lives cannot be taken by these women. Many of the respondents revealed that they were unable to make decisions regarding life events such as marriage and the partner they selected to marry. The following statement has revealed the real scenario for them regarding decision-making in their private spheres.

“My husband was drunker. And he was also a gambler. He used to spend every cent on alcohol and gambling. I had to face many difficulties to raise my children. My husband always disturbed me and hit me. We got married when I was 14 years old. Now I realise that it is a very small time period in our lives. Many girls get married when they are in their teens. Though it is prohibited, they do it secretly”.

In *The Woman in the Body* (1989), Emily Martin documented the alienation that many women experience when confronted with their own bodies. Menstruation is seen as something that happens to women and not as something that is a part of them. The feeling of not being in control of the body was a traumatic experience for some women. The radical feminist theories have a good argument against the marginalization and suppression of women by male-dominated society and cultural norms. They thought that women were suppressed by a male-dominated culture. These women also have to depend on a male-dominated culture.

Widowers have restrictions on going to Kovil, and widows don’t have any restrictions on it. And they also can’t wear ornaments after the death of the husband. But they should wear "thali" to symbolize whether she has gotten married.

Marriage is a personal phenomenon. For several centuries, the marriage of a woman has been decided by her parents or an outsider in her life. In the estate sector, this condition has become common among many women. If a woman gets married according to her opinion,

she has to face many difficulties. If not, she leaves home, giving up every relationship with family members. Sometimes her husband, who is found out by her parents, is a strange person for her. When they do not understand each other properly, family problems will arise.

“That was a proposed marriage. When they proposed me, I opposed it. But my parents forced me to get married. Until I got married to him, I hadn’t seen him. He was 14 years older than me”.

Normally, women depend on men in the South Asian region. When they are in childhood, they depend on their father. When they are growing up, they become lovers, and at that time, they depend on their male partner. After getting married, they have to depend on their husbands, and when they are getting old, women depend on their elder son or sons. In this way, women depend on the superiority of men in their lives. Male dominance is crucial in Tamil culture. Many women in this field have been alienated from their daily activities and from what they had. Because of this alienation, they have been unable to control their money and what they earn. Due to this, they are domesticated and become voiceless.

“He controlled and used money at home and even money that I earned; when I wanted money, I had to request it from him. Sometimes he hits me at that time. Although I think that I don’t give money that I earn, he took money forcefully in the evening”.

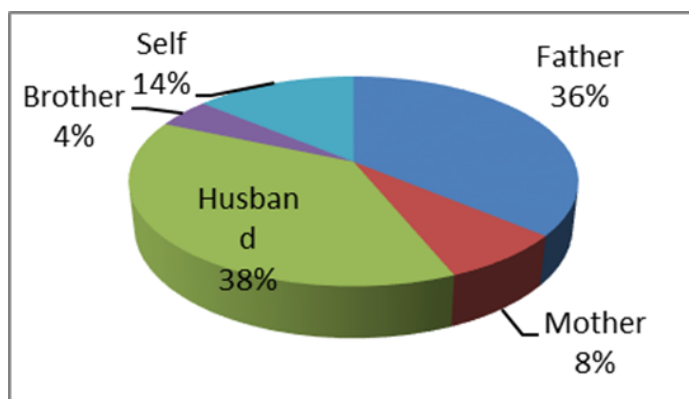
Every person has a right to education. It has been certified by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. Though it is a universal right, the rights of women have been violated by outsiders. The right to education for girls is controlled and decided by their father or brothers. These two people have decided whether she wants to get an education or not. According to interview number 4, she has explained her experience with regard to her education. Many girls have sacrificed their desire for an education in order to support their families and their income. Whether it is liked or disliked, she stopped her education on the wellbeing of the family. Finally, she had to have obeyed these decisions.

“Though I had a desire to go to school, my father said that there was no need to go to school, and when you are in 8 or 9 years, you can go to earn money”.

The working environment of these women and their working conditions are also decided by men or estate authorities. They have to obey the decisions they make. Though there is freedom to get working decisions for people outside the estate, these women have been unable to get working decisions. Although they face financial and other problems when they are working on the estate, they have to adapt to and survive this condition. Interview number 02 explains this in the following way:

“When we worked on the estate, we couldn’t work anywhere outside of the estate. We had to survive our lives using that small amount of money”.

**Figure 9:** Money Controlling Power in the Family



Source: Survey Data, 2022

The above chart shows the person who controls family finances. Father, husband, and brother control money in many families. According to the questionnaire survey, it could be identified that money is controlled by the husband in a large number of families in the study sample. As a percentage, it was 38% of the total respondent families. The second highest percentage was held by fathers, and the percentage was 36%. Income was controlled by the mother or a particular woman who held the financial power in only 28 families out of the total households, and as a percentage, it was 22%.

According to the above data, it has shown how family finance is controlled. It shows how financial power is distributed in a male-dominated society. The priority revolves around male members of the family. Accordingly, father and husband always lead the list, and then it goes to brother and son.



## Findings

According to data, estate workers face prejudice in accessing assets and resources and are more likely to be involved in unpaid family-related tasks or low-paying work. They continue to rank near the bottom of every economic, social, and political indicator, from income, education, and health to political involvement. Domestication of women in the estate sector was discovered to be committed for a variety of reasons, including poverty, a lack of skills and competence to represent them and continue proper livestock, poor decision-making, and a lack of representation in society or the community. It was discovered that poverty prevailed in this study for their upbringing, family, age of marriage, education and schooling, and age of employment. These factors have had a significant impact on household mobility.

Issues about a family member's illness were substantially more important at the household level than at the community level. More precisely, the study discovered that women in the estate sector perform the majority of unpaid and low-wage housework, unskilled labour, and care labour in rural areas. Domestication was primarily facilitated by these women's lack of property and house ownership rights, as well as access to health care and education. Raising voices is critical for social and communal representation. When a group is a minority community or a marginalized group, collective representation is critical. Collective representation will help to raise voices, and if they do not have collective representation, they will remain voiceless.

Despite the fact that it is critical, these women have no opportunity to express their individuality in public. Furthermore, women in the estate sector continue to be underrepresented in decision-making in all domains, both at home and in the public realm. For some women, the struggle to raise their voices began at home. In other cases, women were fairly direct about their feelings about becoming involved in social and community associations and societal initiatives.

The cultural devaluation of females follows, with males having greater status, power, and independence than females. Women have accepted their inherent inadequacy as well as the low value placed on them. Gender was more prominent in female domestication and their exclusion from voices.

Marital status was supposed to be more prominent in the context of women's domestication and voiceless condition. Despite progress, failure to marry or failure in marriage is a total failure for many women, and this circumstance has opened the path to being domestic and mute. Parental status is another important motivation for being domestic, and motherhood allows depressed women to speak out against unfair family or public-sector conditions. Children are the mother's special responsibility in this community.

In comparison to men, women are not socially protected in their daily activities. In any case, the woman has engaged in several activities that may have outweighed her personal interests, yet the guy is the one who obtains statutory social support. The lack of social protection for daily activities also contributes to these women's domestication.

The plantation structure, as well as the limits imposed by the industry as a whole, all have a direct impact on the domestication of women, and poverty has become a critical factor for exclusion from voices.

The customary authority of male dominancy and the cult of domesticity of estate sector women are primarily responsible for the domestication of these women. Poverty and a lack of skills and aptitude, as well as a lack of decision-making power, have caused these women to be excluded from the public and private spheres, as well as from communal and social representation. Meanwhile, discriminatory practices towards women, such as inheritance laws that give land ownership primarily to men or the prioritization of boys over girls in education, may also contribute to women's lower status, which is influenced by domestication. Women in the estate sector are seen as a voiceless pillar of the Sri Lankan economy.

## **Conclusion**

The lack of adequate social protection for women in the estate sector had made them vulnerable. Their frailty had been restricted their creative output to the domestic sphere. The community in the estate sector was consistently associated women's roles with those who are in the home. All the activities that are considered as work and performed by the women are connoted as part of the domestic role. In certain situations, women may undertake public activities, but this activity is still perceived as a domestic role. They are still waiting to speak out against domestication because of their domestication. The women in the estate sector understand and accept domestication as an obligation without any

rejection because it is fundamentally established based on norms and culture. Later by the administrative structure.

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